

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE SUBJECT: WOUNDED WARRIOR CLOTHING
SUPPORT PROGRAM BRIEFERS: SARAH FINNICUM, DIRECTOR OF SUPPLY, DEPARTMENT OF THE
ARMY; CAPTAIN JUSTIN REDFERN, WOUNDED WARRIOR TRANSITION BRIGADE; COLONEL
REBECCA SAMSON, CHIEF, TROOP SUPPORT DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CHARLES
JACKSON, ARMY AND AIR FORCE EXCHANGE SERVICE TIME: 2:14 P.M. EDT DATE:
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Good afternoon, everyone. This is
Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs again. Thank you so much for joining us
for today's Army Bloggers Roundtable. We are very pleased to have with us Mrs.
Sarah Finnicum, director of supply at headquarters, Department of the Army, and
others with the Army's G4, who are on the line and in the room, to discuss the
Wounded Warrior Clothing Support Program. They're here to discuss that program
and take your questions.

Again, please keep your mute button pressed when you're nit speaking or
asking a question. Also, when you're asking or answering a question, please
identify yourself because we do have so many folks out there joining us on the
line.

Now I'm pleased to introduce Mrs. Finnicum to begin the call with her
opening remarks. Thank you -- (inaudible).

MS. FINNICUM: Thank you.

As Lindsey (sic) said, my name is Sarah Finnicum. I've been the
director of supply here on the Army staff for approximately 18 months. Just to
give you some background, in January of 2008, General Christianson, who was the
Joint Chiefs of Staff logistician, sent an e-mail saying he had heard that the
Marine Corps had a program where they did alterations for their wounded
warriors, did the Army have a similar program?

And when we did our research, we discovered that we actually had no
formal program in place to support alterations of military uniforms. The
organization "Sew Much Comfort," we discovered, had already been doing
alterations for soldiers. They focus primarily on the civilian clothing, but
they did take on Army uniforms when the soldiers requested it.

But we all agreed that that really was something that the Army should
do, and needed to do, to take care of its wounded warriors. So, we stood-up a
task force, literally within days of General Christianson's e-mail, saying, hey,
you guys ought to look into this.

So, the group came from throughout the Army. We had occupational therapists from Walter Reed; we had AAFES -- that's our Air Force and Army Exchange Service (sic. I'm pretty sure I got that acronym wrong, but our "PXs," for those familiar with the terms that we use. The G3 of the Army sent personnel to support it. They typically provide the resources for these types of endeavors.

We had PM soldier who actually procures all of our uniforms and equipment that soldiers use; a PEO soldier, or the Defense Logistics Agency. My staff participated. We had several wounded warriors that came to actually show us what had been done to their uniforms.

So we really had a very good group that put all their brain power into this initiative. And, literally, in May we stood the program up. So, while I was somewhat chagrined that we had not done this sooner, I was happy that it only took us four months to get the program in place.

It went operational at Walter Reed in May. We've since expanded it to the Burn Center down in San Antonio, Texas. And all of our AAFES PXs now have been notified that if a wounded warrior comes to them, they will be offered free alterations of their military uniforms. So, I think that -- in a nutshell, is what we've done with the program. And we've got a whole group of experts around the table, or in other locations, available to answer any specific questions that you may have.

MS. KYZER: Okay, great. We'll go ahead and take questions.

To start out, Ginger, did you have a question?

Q No, I just wanted to say thank you to all of you for this -- for the effort that you, that you put into this. I know that we started this back in -- I guess, Carla Bergner, our ambassador from Walter Reed, and some of the seamstresses in D.C. who have done these alterations, are very thankful for all the effort that you put in, and the attention you've give to this. And it's really just a tremendous effort.

And at Sew Much Comfort we are honored to have been any small part of it. But it's just great to see that these guys are able to get back into uniform and to recuperate comfortably. So, a lot of gratitude from us on you guys taking this up.

MS. KYZER: Great.

And, you know, we should have some other bloggers on the line. Is there anyone else out there on the line who has a question?

(No audible response.)

MS. KYZER: Okay, well, I did get a couple of questions from folks who e-mailed and said they couldn't participate, so we'll go ahead and go those. Again, don't be shy. So, if folks have other questions that come up, please feel free to answer those.

One of the questions that I know that you -- you know, you expressed sensitivity to this earlier, but someone did ask that, "Organizations such as Sew Much Comfort have been around for so long, what prompted the delay, in terms of the Army not realizing that there was need amongst our wounded warriors?"

Was it just being addressed at a command or local level? Or, how did the process get to Army level, and maybe why was there that lag time?

MS. FINNICUM: Honestly, I think Sew Much Comfort had done such a good job of being there at the hospitals when the patients came in, and offering their services, that it really wasn't apparent that we had a disconnect. They were getting their alterations done. You didn't see soldiers walking around inappropriately attired. And when I say inappropriately, I just mean with ill-fitting uniforms, where somebody had not made the effort to make adjustments to the uniforms.

So, it wasn't invisible -- if you were just seeing soldiers out in the environment, that they had not been able to get their clothing altered. But, again, when the question got asked, we said, oh, my gosh, we need to take care of this. I mean, we felt it was our responsibility.

And we very much appreciated the generosity and support of Sew Much Comfort, but it's our job to take care of our own, particularly when it comes to a military uniform. So, I would tell you, from my own perspective, I would just have to almost say an oversight on our part.

Q Well, and -- can I just add something? I hate to jump in, but adaptive clothing is a new concept. And often we get the question -- and Sew Much Comfort, of, well, why isn't this just being provided? This is not commercially available clothing, it's clothing that Sew Much Comfort has created in collaboration with the medical staff at the different hospitals. And it is -- so, it's not something that's commercially available. It's not something that is common practice.

So, I think that -- I would not say that the Army, or the Marines, or any of the services were remiss in not providing this. This is something that is brand new to the market in response to the service members coming back. But, it's not a slow process. And so I actually applaud the Army for coming on board so quickly.

I mean, four months, from start to -- you know, from starting the concept to fielding the program, is incredibly fast, in any -- by any stretch of the imagination. So, I think they did a phenomenal job, once the need was identified, in getting the program out there and going. MS. KYZER: Great, thank you, Ginger.

Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs.

I'll take another -- I'll throw out another question from my, from my inbox. One of those was: Okay, if someone knows a soldier, or if there is a soldier out there who is either listening in or who reads the transcript from this call, and they know that they need that adaptive clothing, how do they contact the Wounded Warrior Clothing Support Program, or how do they -- do they go through their chain of command, go to their commander and request that? Go to the hospital?

MS. FINNICUM: I think Captain Redfern, who's from the Wounded Warrior Transition Brigade, should answer that.

You there, Captain Redfern?

CAPT. REDFERN: Yes, ma'am, I am.

Again, this is Captain Redfern. I'm with the Warriors Transition Brigade. The standard practice is for the warrior in transition who, you know, feels like they have a need for adaptive clothing, to contact their chain of command, either their squad leader, or their platoon sergeant in their company command channels that way; or through their occupational therapist.

And we push the majority of our requests through the occupational therapy section in the hospital here, and they do a fantastic job of screening what is necessary for the warrior and then providing it to us in a simplified manner.

MS. KYZER: Okay, great.

And another question -- again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs -- is what are some of them common adaptations that you see? I think some of them were described in the "Our News" article. I'm not sure, Captain Redfern, or someone else out there, is appropriate to answer that, but what are typical adaptations (sic).

COL. SAMSON: This is Colonel Samson. I'm the incoming division chief for the Clothing and Individual Equipment, the Army G-4. The modifications that I know we published in our stand two message includes addition zippers to the seams of trousers and coat sleeves; giving a soldier -- to give them an access to a prosthetic. Also, they can put elastic blousing, or Velcro closures of the bottom of the trouser legs. They've also -- have made modifications to shirt sleeves and the knee area of the trousers.

And they also can add additional fabric on the inside of the uniform, where injuries are sensitive to the prosthetics, so that there could be a better wear and tear -- (audio break) -- I guess, but also to emphasize that these modifications are solely on Army uniforms in this program, not civilian clothing.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

Q And -- this is Ginger Dosedel with Sew Much Comfort, again. If the service member finds themselves still in need of civilian clothing at any point in time, they can e-mail us at orders@sewmuchcomfort.org, or just go on the website and find the order area, and they can -- they can order civilian clothing as well, free of charge.

MS. KYZER: Okay, great.

Unless we have any other questions, I do have, I think, probably one more question -- this is Lindy Kyzer from Army Public Affairs.

One of those questions was, in terms of -- now that the Army is involved in this, is there any -- we talked about, I think a lot is in reference to about how the adaptive clothing is very unique, and individualized and tailored specifically to the soldier. Are there any common names within Clothing Support that you found for standard improvements or changes in the Army uniform for wounded warriors? I mean, is there any potential, or looking at mass production of certain uniforms, or is this literally a one-on-one, person-by-person process?

MS. FINNICUM: This is Sarah Finnicum again. I can tell you we actually talked about doing that when we stood-up our task force -- could we run a special production line and do the Velcro in-seams? Truly, these have to be tailored to the individual soldier. We looking into it, and there was just no way you could go and run anything off of a normal production line to satisfy this requirement.

They are uniquely fitted for each soldier and each wound is different. So, we found it was really more efficient, and probably much more comfortable for the soldier to get the uniform altered to specifically fit him or her, based on individual needs.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

MS. FINNICUM: I'd also like to add they can get boots modified to support amputations. They found that your typical boot doesn't fit well, so you can get them with heel adjustments, lifts in them. They'll just really work until they find a boot that's comfortable for the soldier to wear.

MS. KYZER: Great.

Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. Do we have any additional questions out there?

Q Can I ask a question, Lindy?

This is Ginger Dosedel from Sew Much Comfort again.

My question is, how widespread is the program now? I know you opened it up at Walter Reed and at BAMC, but is this available at post levels, all the WTU/WTB-type activities?

MS. FINNICUM: Yes, it is. This is Sarah Finnicum speaking again.

AAFES just released a message making sure that all of their tailor shops are aware that this option is free of charge. In other words, they tell how to bill back for this so that they don't bill the individual soldiers.

So it's now available anyplace that you have a tailor shop within the AAFES network.

Q And is there information that's going out to all of the P.T./O.T. shops as well, that gives them the information that this is available -- or do you not know that?

MS. FINNICUM: No, I do know that. (Laughs.)

Yes, we published the (stand-two ?) message that was released on the 4th of August. And we've also got an official message that was just recently released. So it's gone out Army-wide, either through AKO or through the official message channel that the Army uses.

Q Super.

COL. SAMSON: This is Colonel Samson again from the Army G-4.

And we also know that AAFES leadership did send that information out to the rest of the facilities -- the PXs and whatnot -- that have the tailor support available.

MS. KYZER: Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs.

One other question that had been brought up via e-mail: The program launched in May 2008 and you really didn't get such a rapid response in terms of turning around the four months. It's now been four months since it was launched. Have there been any changes since May or is there kind of a course that you're on in terms of where you're at now with the program and where you hope to be? MS. FINNICUM: Well, we're hoping that things like this blog site will help spread the word, because we've really had a fairly small number of people participate thus far with the program. I'm not sure if it's a lack of information out there. I mean, the population is small that you're dealing with -- soldiers that actually choose to stay on active duty, which in the past we've never done that before.

You know, we would medically retire personnel or discharge them from the Army. That's one of the reasons you really can't go back in history and find the need for a program like this, which is what I would say pretty much put us where we are today with coming into it late. We just didn't have a need for it in the past.

So we're hoping to get the word out. We really do want soldiers to take advantage of this. We know that they in the past would have had to have -- or in the future, if we have soldiers staying on active duty -- uniforms need to be altered. We're sure they're figuring out a way to get it done. We'd just like to be the ones providing them that service at no charge, rather than them paying for it potentially out of their own pocket.

MS. KYZER: Great.

Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs.

I promise that my questions are officially done for now.

I know that we have several folks out there on the line from G-4. I'm not sure if you have anything else to add -- any topics or specifics of the program that we didn't reference that you'd like to bring to light. If so, I wanted to open up time now for you to do that.

No pressure!

Q If they don't have a question -- my name's Mike Close and I've got a question for Colonel Samson, if she's still on the line.

COL. SAMSON: I'm here.

Q I'm in the Air Force and I was listening to what you were saying and to what the representative from AAFES was talking about. And one of the things that I was listening for was has AAFES done anything, or are there any plans to modify the unique Air Force pixilated uniform?

And the second part of that question would be, since you're -- Colonel Samson, since you're G-4, do you have somebody in A-4 there at the Air staff that you are working with or trying to work with, because this is a program that has received no discussion in the Air Force from what we can see -- at least at the organizational level.

So that's really a two-partner: Is G-4 talking with A-4? If so, who? And is AAFES planning on providing any of the information to the Air Force AAFES site so they can start on -- and do we have permission to modify the Air Force pixilated uniforms?

COL. SAMSON: This is Colonel Samson from the G-4.

The answer to your first question is if we've been working with anyone in the A-4. We have not. The G-4 has not worked directly with the A-4 on this. And as Ms. Finnicum described earlier, we actually -- this stems from a message that we had gotten from General Christianson, who happened to be the J-4 -- the Joint-4 at the time. So if they were to link it up with the Air Force A-4 that normally would come from the Joint Staff to send to the services.

As far as the second question on the AAFES -- Charles, if you're there, are you able to answer that question? Charles? Did he hang up?

MR. JACKSON: No, I'm here.

COL. SAMSON: Oh, okay.

MR. JACKSON: This is Charles Jackson with the CSO (ph). If an Air Force personnel is at an Army facility, we have the authorizations to have that modification done.

Q Okay, well, that's part of my concern. The preponderance of the people in the Air Force who are needing or could be seeking needing modified uniforms aren't at Army locations.

But I think, Colonel Samson, you probably hit it square on the head. J-4 -- well, reverse that: A-4 probably hasn't been made aware of the program going on to go to J-4 to ask the question on any service, multiservice-wide operation from AAFES, MCX Navy exchange -- the whole exchange system, to begin these modification.

Now, granted, the Air Force need is far less than what we're seeing in the Army and the Marine Corps, but the need is still there nonetheless. And I think it's just a lack of information.

I think probably, more will be gained from taking the excerpts and this transcript from the phone call from the Army Public Affairs folks and distribute it to Air Force A-1 and A-4 -- the personnel, as well as the logistics side of the house -- to try to make some inroads, because this is -- I found out about this conversation completely through a different source of information. And couldn't -- I apologize upfront for not jumping on at the very beginning of the phone call, but it's -- I'm about three hours difference at your time zone.

So it's great information. It's a great program. We couldn't have done it any faster. I'm glad we did it -- you have done it as fast as you have, but we're leaving out a whole chunk of the population that needs to be addressed, and those are the Air Force uniforms, I think.

So thank you all for your assistance and letting me butt into your conversation.

MS. FINNICUM: Mike, this is Sarah Finnicum.

Q Yes, ma'am.

MS. FINNICUM: I will get in touch with my counterpart in the Air Force and forward this information to him and offer to have my folks come up and brief him. So I'll go ahead and do that on my own. I really should have done that sooner, also. But we'll take care of that before close of business today. Q Well, it's -- you know, we all run into the traditional -- well, it has exacerbated itself. In the mid-'80s and '90s, when the Army and the Air Force went to a common BDU, that solved a lot of problems that (SNI ?) was having and various folks to providing a common uniform. But when we all went and decided -- when all four services chose a different pixilated uniform and a different pixilated pattern, it just -- and design -- that just put it back where we were and set the clock back, on a common uniform for combat operations, years.

But as a result, then, with the Air Force just coming online with their own tiger stripped pixilation, nobody's wanting to do -- is willing to do any kind of modification until somebody says, hey, this is available. It's being done and it should be available to the women and men who need it. And the information just isn't getting out.

So it's great that you're doing it and thank you. I think talking with the Navy's rep that represents the Air Force and is more Air Force-centric will probably get us the first step, but I think it's probably going to be a requirement to have the J-4 sit down and look at the other service 4s, as well as the personnel side of the house, because in the Air Force, it's the A-1 personnel as to who -- who say, this is what we're going to authorize and mandate for uniform or a uniform change. And it's just the A-4 guys who execute through DLA and AAFES.

But again, thanks.

MS. KYZER: Thank you, sir.

Any other questions or comments out there?

If not, we'll go ahead and wrap up and I'll again turn it to Ms. Finnicum to offer a few closing remarks to close us out.

MS. FINNICUM: Well, what I would hope is that we get more business as a result of this, because it's certainly our intent to provide the best support

that we can to our soldiers. And we'll certainly offer it up. I mean, AAFES is there supporting the Air Force and the Army, so it's not too big of stretch to just tell them: Start supporting the airmen that come in with the right notes from their occupational therapists at no cost to them.

We've found that the program really doesn't take that much to run. And I'm willing to bet we could come up with the resources to keep this going for pretty much any servicemember that walks in the door and needs help with a uniform alteration, because of a battle wound. So we'll take of that. That should be pretty easy to do.

I would just encourage you to share this information with any soldiers that you know of that are in need of this support.

Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Thank you, Mrs. Finnicum. And thank you and everyone for participating in today's roundtable and for everyone else at G-4. And again, to Ginger at Sew Much Comfort.

You can find the transcript and audio file at www.defenselink.mil/blogger.

This concludes today's roundtable. Have a great day everyone. Thank you.

END.